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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001767

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: PRIVY COUNCILOR PREM THINKS THAKSIN SHOULD GO, BUT  
STAYS ABOVE THE FRAY

REF: A. BANGKOK 1667

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 1627

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce reason 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Privy Councilor Gen. Prem says that PM Thaksin should "go now," but he will not be the one to tell him. He told the Ambassador in a meeting March 22 that Thaksin's hawkish advisors do not have the country's best interests at heart. He agreed with the "doves" in the ruling party that Thaksin needed to step down now to preserve any hope of a future political life. He is concerned that the April 2 elections will be a huge waste of money that will just result in more political problems. However, Prem is still unwilling to try to speak to the PM himself. He seems to hope still for a solution without intervention from the Privy Council or the Palace. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador made a low-key call on Privy Councilor Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda on March 22. Prem is one of the most respected elder statesmen in the Kingdom, and known to be very close to the King. Prem was most interested in hearing the Ambassador's observations about the current political impasse. Based on our discussions around town, the Ambassador described two political groups within the ruling Thai Rak Thai (TRT), the "hawks" and the "doves". PM Thaksin was surrounded by the hawks (MP Newin, Natural Resources Minister Yongyuth, DPM Wisanu, PM's Secretary-General Prommin). They were telling Thaksin to keep fighting, that the election would demonstrate his popularity and prove to be his vindication. The doves, like DPM Surakiart and Education Minister Chaturon (refs) believe that the window is rapidly closing on any chance Thaksin has of preserving his political future. They believe that his only hope is to "take a break" from politics for the good of the country, let there be a real multi-party election and political reform. In the election that follows this process, he might be able to participate. Prem responded, "The doves are right."

[1](#)3. (C) Prem said that he did not know whose interests the hawks were serving, but it was not the interests of the country. Prem noted that Thaksin seemed to be fleeing from Bangkok, unable to function in the capital -- a terrible image for the PM. The Ambassador said that the doves appeared to be at a loss, without access to Thaksin to give him a more realistic account of the situation. They had encouraged the Ambassador to let Prem know about their concerns, and they felt that only some intervention from Prem or Army Commander Gen. Sonthi would get through to Thaksin and make him reconsider his position.

[1](#)4. (C) Prem asked, rhetorically "They think I should tell the PM? I don't even know where he is." Surprisingly, Prem said that Thaksin did not listen to his advice in any case.

In Prem's view, the doves should get together and go to Thaksin themselves to make their case. He encouraged the Ambassador to convey that view to the TRT members who had approached him. In Prem's view, if Thaksin decided now to "take a break," he might have a political future. The Thai courts would protect his assets if he had, in fact, done nothing wrong -- and there is no proof that he has. He may think that he can last through the election, get his vindication, and then step down. But the election is a big waste of money, and will result in all kinds of problems. "He needs to go now," Prem said.

15. (C) If Thaksin steps down now, according to Prem, most people would welcome it, and Thaksin would "win merit." If he stays through the election, somehow seats a parliament and returns as prime minister under dubious circumstances, the mobs will just come back. The people want another prime minister.

16. (C) Comment: As Prem requested, we will convey his views to the TRT contacts who has spoken to us, although we doubt they will have sufficient backbone to confront the PM, or the wherewithal to get through to him. We note that Prem may not be telling us everything. In May 1992, Ambassador Lambertson called on him after several days of violence had rocked Bangkok. He affected to be out of touch with the situation, and revealed little of what was going on. That evening, he brought the leaders of the two sides together for their historic audience with the King, which led to the end of the confrontation. During the meeting today, he was more engaged and communicative, but still reluctant to tip his hand. While he may be more involved than he lets on, we believe that Prem's reluctance to meddle in politics is genuine. This supports the view we have heard from others,

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that the Palace still wants the two sides to resolve this without royal intervention and is not yet ready to step in.  
End comment.  
BOYCE